

MINUTES
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission Meeting
FWP Headquarters - Helena, MT
April 11, 2013

Commission Members Present: Chairman Vermillion, Bob Ream, Richard Stuker,
Matthew Tourtlotte and Larry Wetsit

Fish, Wildlife & Parks Staff Present: Jeff Hagener, Director and FWP Staff.

Guests: See April 11, 2013 Commission file folder for sign-in sheet.

Topics of Discussion:

1. Call to Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. New Commissioner Introduction
3. Agency Overview
4. Approval of Minutes of March 14, 2013 Commission Meeting
5. Approval of Commission Expenses
6. Commission Reports
7. Director's Report
8. 2013 Commission Meeting Schedule
9. Glendive Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture Paddlefish Advisory Committee-Endorsement
10. Yellowstone River Temporary Closure – Final
11. Bitterroot River Temporary Closure – Proposed
12. Clark Fork River and Warm Springs WMA Temporary Closure – Proposed
13. Closure Extension for the Clark Fork River Bank at Milltown – Final
14. Closure Extension for Blackfoot River at Milltown – Final
15. 2013 Lion Quotas – Proposed
16. Suspension of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Plan Elements – Final
17. 2013 Grazing & Farming Leases – Final
18. Open Microphone – Public Opportunity to Address FWP Issues Not on Agenda

1. Call to Order - Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Vermillion called the meeting to order at 8:33 a.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. New Commissioner Introduction

Chairman Vermillion welcomed the three new Commissioners: Larry Wetsit, Richard Stuker and Matthew Tourtlotte. New Commissioners gave a brief introduction of themselves.

3. Agency Overview

Agency Administrators and Supervisors gave an overview of their Division and Regions.

4. Approval of the Commission Meeting Minutes of March 14, 2013

Action: Commissioner Ream and Commissioner Stuker seconded the motion to approve the March 14, 2013 minutes. Motion carried.

5. Approval of Commission Expenses

Action: Commissioner Ream moved and Commissioner Tourtlotte seconded the motion to approve the Commission expenses. Motion Carried.

6. Commission Reports

Commissioner Wetsit stated he has received few calls from sportsman in his district.

Commissioner Ream reported this year is the Centennial of FWP Commission. Commended FWP staff on dealings with the legislature.

Commissioner Stuker stated he has received calls regarding archery in the breaks, bison and Milk River Ranch

Commissioner Tourtlotte stated he has received calls on mountain lion hunting/quotas and lakes in Region 1.

Chairman Vermillion introduced constituents that were in attendance and reported dispersal hunts have been happening and seem successful.

7. Director's Report

Director Hagener discussed funding areas and legislative issues. Explained the way communication will be done in the near future between Commissioners and the Department. Attended Western Governor's Sage Grouse Task Force meeting, explained issues regarding Sage Grouse. Stated the former Wolf Advisory Council is meeting on April 12 to discuss the Wolf Management Plan.

8. 2013 Commission Meeting Schedule

Commissioners and Director Hagener Commission Meeting Schedule - will discuss further at next month's meeting.

9. Glendive Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture Paddlefish Advisory Committee-Endorsement

Don Skaar, Bureau, Fish Management Division Chief explained Montana statute allows someone who legally takes a paddlefish from the Yellowstone River (Glendive to North Dakota state line) to donate the paddlefish roe to one Montana nonprofit corporation for processing and marketing as caviar. The paddlefish roe must be brought to the Intake Fishing Access Site for donation. The FWP Commission selects the non-profit organization that will be permitted to collect, process and sell the donated paddlefish roe. In 1990, the Commission selected the Glendive Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture and FWP has renewed the Chamber's permit each year since. Thirty percent of the proceeds from the sale of caviar, in excess of costs go to FWP to benefit the paddlefish fishery and 70% of the proceeds in excess of costs go to the nonprofit organization to fund historical, cultural, recreational, and fish and wildlife projects. The law requires the Commission to appoint an advisory committee to solicit, review proposals and fund projects with the proceeds. The committee must consist of one member of the nonprofit organization, two area local government representatives, and two representatives of area anglers. The committee is required to notify the Commission of its actions. Public involvement consists of presenting this recommendation to the commission in a public forum. The Chamber is recommending that the commission re-appoint the following individuals to the 2013 Paddlefish Roe Advisory Committee:

- Mike Roe - Glendive Area Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture
- Kevin Dorwart - City of Glendive Director of Operations
- Tim Mort - West Glendive Fire Department chief and Dawson County fire warden
- Kevin McGovern - Reynolds Warehouse Grocery meat cutter in Glendive
- James Thielman - Thielman Oil Productions Services, Inc. in Glendive

Action: Commissioner Ream moved and Commissioner Wetsit seconded that the Commission is satisfied with how the Glendive Chamber of Commerce and Agriculture administered the Paddlefish Roe Program in 2012, and the Commission approve the Advisory Committee members recommended by the Chamber.

Commissioner Ream asked if funding for 2013 is the same as previous years.

Brad Schmidt, Region 7 Supervisor explained funding is slightly lower than previous years based on water flow at the time of fish spawning but the cost of eggs has increased. Harvest quota has remained the same.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed

10. Yellowstone River Temporary Closure – Final

Charlie Sperry, Fisheries Recreation Management Specialist explained on December 13, 2012 the FWP Commission, represented by Commissioner Dan Vermillion, adopted an emergency rule closing the Yellowstone River to floating from

Mayor's Landing Fishing Access Site (FAS) downstream to Highway 89 Bridge FAS and closed the lands immediately adjacent to the construction site. The closure was necessary to address an imminent threat to public safety caused by river hydraulics present at a Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) bridge construction site, near Livingston. The force and direction of water flowing around temporary work bridge piers created dangerous floating conditions. An emergency rule may be in effect no longer than 120 days, this particular rule will expire on April 12, 2013 and MDT anticipates that conditions may continue to warrant a river closure beyond this date. At the February 14, 2013 Commission meeting, the Commission proposed an annual rule that would continue the closure beyond April 12 and give FWP, with approval from the local FWP Commissioner, the authority to repeal the rule once conditions no longer present an undue hazard to public safety. The proposed rule would shorten the section of river closed to floating, which terminate 1,000 feet below the construction site, and would close the shoreline 1000 feet upstream and downstream of Park Street Bridge to all public occupation and recreation. FWP solicited public comments and conducted a public meeting in Livingston; three people submitted comments.

Action: Commissioner Wetsit moved and Commissioner Ream seconded the Commission adopt an annual rule closing the Yellowstone River to floating from Mayor's Landing fishing site to 1,000 feet below the Park Street Bridge in Livingston, and to all recreational use of the shoreline 1,000 feet above and below the bridge.

Chairman Vermillion commended the Department especially Region 3 for their quick handling of this project.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment

Action on Motion: Motion Passed

11. Bitterroot River Temporary Closure – Proposed

Charlie Sperry, Fisheries Recreation Management Specialist explained as early as August 1, 2013, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) is scheduled to begin replacing Florence Bridge over the Bitterroot River on the East Side Highway near Florence, Montana. The project will occur over the next two years, will include road improvements in the immediate vicinity of the bridge. The Florence Bridge FAS is located adjacent to the bridge and highway right-of-way and although the access site itself will not be used, the adjacent highway right-of-way will be used by workers and equipment. MDT has requested that FWP close a portion of the FAS due to safety concerns over people entering the work zone. Bridge construction will require crews to conduct some work within the river channel such as during the construction of coffer dams, the construction of work bridges and potential blasting of old bridge piers. MDT contract provisions stipulate that the contractor must provide safe public float passage through the construction site, including a 40' wide x 6' high effective opening between instream construction-related obstructions, and must provide appropriate navigational signage and hazard posting. MDT anticipates that there may be times when construction activities will create unsafe conditions for river users and thus has requested that FWP be prepared to temporarily close the river to public use in the proximity of the construction site. FWP is recommending that the Commission propose an annual rule that would close that portion of the Florence Bridge FAS that lies between the existing highway bridge and a point 150' upstream. The proposed rule, if necessary, would give FWP, with approval from the local FWP Commissioner, the authority to temporarily close the entire FAS and the Bitterroot River up to 1000' above and 1000' below the construction site, to address public safety concerns and repeal any or all portions of the rule once conditions no longer present a public safety concern. The rule would be in effect for one year, at which time the Commission could assess the need for extending the rule for another year. FWP would solicit public comments and report to the Commission at its June 6 meeting.

Action: Commissioner Ream moved and Commissioner Tourtlotte seconded the Commission propose an annual rule closing a portion of the Florence Bridge FAS and grant the Department and the local Commissioner the authority to close the entire site and the Bitterroot River 1,000 feet above and below the bridge if conditions become unsafe.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed

12. Clark Fork River and Warm Springs WMA Temporary Closure – Proposed

Charlie Sperry, Fisheries Recreation Management Specialist explained the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is conducting a cleanup project to remove contaminated soils in the streambanks and historic floodplain within the Clark Fork River near the community of Warm Springs. The project is part of the Milltown Reservoir/Clark Fork River Superfund Site, which includes the Clark Fork River from its headwaters below Warm Springs Ponds to the former Milltown Reservoir east of Missoula. The first phase of construction, initiated in March 2013, begins at the river's headwaters below

Warm Springs Ponds and proceeds downstream for approximately 1.75 river miles and cleanup activities will last approximately one year. Haul trucks and heavy equipment are using a road within the Warm Springs Wildlife Management Area (WMA), which is adjacent to the north boundary of the project area. This portion of the Clark Fork River is a popular catch-and-release brown trout fishery. Anglers were entering the construction area and encountering heavy equipment in close proximity and also encountering haul trucks and other heavy equipment on the WMA road, which is too narrow to accommodate construction equipment and public vehicles at the same time. This situation presented a serious public safety concern and DEQ requested that FWP implement an emergency closure of 1.75 miles of river, the WMA road, and a 10-acre section of the WMA located between the road and the construction zone. FWP concurred that there was an imminent threat to public safety and adopted an emergency closure rule on March 29, 2013. An emergency rule may be in effect no longer than 120 days; this emergency rule will expire on July 27, 2013 and Phase 1 of the cleanup project will continue past this date. FWP is recommending that the Commission propose an annual rule that would continue the closure and give FWP, with approval from the local Commissioner, authority to repeal the rule once conditions no longer present an undue hazard to public safety. FWP would solicit public comments and report to the Commission at its June 6 meeting.

Action: Commissioner Ream moved and Commissioner Stuker seconded the Commission propose an annual rule closing 1.75 river miles of the Clark Fork River, 10 acres of the Warm Springs WMA, and 1/3 mile of the WMA road.

Chairman Vermillion stated this area is a very popular area with anglers and asked how long the project will take.

Tom Mostad, Natural Resource Damage Program explained the construction contract is about 300 days maybe more; could be up to this time next year depending on weather and restrictions.

Chairman Vermillion asked to mitigate the impact on the recreational angler.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed

13. Closure Extension for the Clark Fork River Bank at Milltown – Final

Roger Semler, Parks Assistant Administrator explained cleanup and restoration of the Clark Fork River associated with the Milltown Dam Superfund site was completed in the summer of 2012. In 2006, the FWP Commission authorized the closure of short stretches of the river for roughly five years. In 2011, the Commission extended the closure on the river for an additional two years, with a tentative reopening set for July 1, 2013. Restoration work is complete on the Clark Fork River and project managers with the Natural Resource Damage Program believe the closure of the river to swimming, floating and boating is no longer necessary but recommend that restored areas on the river bank remain closed and access to be restricted to gravel bars along the river until such time that vegetation is better established. FWP initiated a 30-day public comment period on the proposed extension of the closure of the Clark Fork River bank while reopening the river to floating on May 1, 2013. A total of 29 comments specifically addressing the Clark Fork River were received: 22 comments supported the proposed action, 4 comments supported the proposed action but offered conditions or additional suggestions, 3 comments neither supported nor opposed the proposed action; and no comments opposed to the proposed actions.

Action: Commissioner Ream moved and Commissioner Wetsit seconded the Commission adopt a Biennial Rule to close the river bank on the Clark Fork River to public occupancy with the exception of gravel bars while opening the river to floating, boating and swimming on May 1, 2013.

Chairman Vermillion asked how the Department will enforce this?

Semler explained the Department will take an educational pro-active approach. Public information, news releases, signage, posting at the right places, communication with enforcement and parks staff.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed

14. Closure Extension for Blackfoot River at Milltown – Final

Roger Semler, Parks Assistant Administrator explained cleanup and restoration of the Blackfoot River associated with the Milltown Dam Superfund site was completed in the summer of 2012. In 2006, FWP Commission authorized the closure of short stretches of the Blackfoot River for five years for boating, floating and swimming. In 2011, the Commission extended the closure on the Blackfoot River for an additional two years, with a tentative reopening set for July 1, 2013. The lower Blackfoot River poses numerous hazards for river recreationists. The Interstate 90 bridge piers and remnants of the Bonner Dam pose significant hazards to river recreationists and until an appropriate hazard removal and risk management plan/strategy is developed the river should remain closed until progress is made. FWP implemented a 30-day public comment period on the proposed extension. A total of 47 comments were received: 18 comments supported the proposed action to extend the closure on the Blackfoot River but allow for bank access through July 1, 2015; 8 comments supported the proposed action, but offered conditions or additional suggestions; 7 comments neither supported nor opposed the proposed action; and 14 comments opposed extending the river closure. The Department will take an educational approach, public information, news releases, signage, posting at the right places, communication with enforcement and parks staff.

Action: Commissioner Ream moved and Commissioner Tourtlotte seconded that the Commission propose a Biennial Rule to extend the closure on the lower Blackfoot River for boating, floating and swimming but allow bank access until July 1, 2015.

Chairman Vermillion asked about the time frame and public frustration.

Semler explained the Department has engaged in conversation with DOT, DEQ, NRD and Governor's office. Only way to eliminate the hazard is to completely rebuild piers; would take at least three years.

Chairman Vermillion asked if the piers were interstate piers?

Semler stated yes. Looking at hazard mitigation options, need closure to avoid tragic event until clean-up is completed.

Chairman Vermillion recommended making this an annual rule, revisit the issue April 2014 and look for alternatives.

Semler stated that could be done. Other public safety and emergency response entities support the closure.

Chairman Vermillion asked Commissioner Ream if he minded amending his motion to an annual rule

Commissioner stated no he would not.

Chairman Vermillion explained his objective is not to enforce the Department to ask for public comment process but to update the Commission at that time.

Amended Action: Commissioner Ream moved and Commissioner Tourtlotte seconded to amend the action to an annual rule and extend the closure on the lower Blackfoot River for boating, floating and swimming but allow bank access until April 2014 and will re-evaluate to extend to July 1, 2015 should the conditions on the ground still exist.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Rod Bullis, supports the amended action and acknowledged that the Missoula County Commission would like to be more involved.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed

15. 2013 Lion Quotas – Proposed

George Pauley, Wildlife Management Division Chief explained Hunting districts (HDs) below proposed changes from 2012 quotas and sub-quotas. All other quotas/sub-quotas not listed, are proposed to be unchanged from 2012 levels. Quotas apply to any legal lion unless otherwise noted and as influenced by female sub-quotas. Formal public comment will run through Monday, May 20 and any final adoption will take place at the June 5 FWP Commission meeting.

Region 2		Female		Male		Special Licenses	
		2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013
Lower Clark Fork	200 & 201	10	9	10	9	20	18
	202 & 203	15	14	15	14	30	28
Bitterroot	204, 260 & 261	2	2	5	2	10	4
	240	3	2	5	2	10	4
	250	7	4	7	4	14	8
	270	7	4	7	4	14	8
Blackfoot	280, 281, 284 & 293	7	5	7	5	14	10
	283 & 285	8	5	8	5	16	10
	290, 291, 292, 293 & 298	7	4	7	5	14	9
Upper Clark Fork	210	0	0	7	3	7	3

Action: *Commissioner Ream moved and Chairman Vermillion seconded the Commission to adopt the proposed 2013 lion quotas/sub-quotas as presented by FWP for Region 2.*

Pauley gave a brief description on the hybrid season framework.

Mike Thompson, Wildlife Manager Region 2 explained the lion quotas for the Region and the background on how quotas were made.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Dan Peterson, Bitterroot Houndsmen Association President, agrees with proposals but would like to add more permits to the units.

Cal Ruark, Darby, hound hunter, asking the Commission to look at the way they come up with quotas. Problems with outfitters, a big issue.

Rod Bullis, houndsmen, appreciates the work Region 2 has done on quotas.

Roland Dean, Chairman, Montana State Houndsmen Association. Would like to see open quotas, not permits.

Jim Sttachan, problems are happening state wide, not just Region 2 especially overruns and illegal outfitters.

Chairman Vermillion asked Strachan were the illegal outfitters are,

Strachan stated he has talked with houndsmen around the state and it is a state wide problem.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed

Region 6

- Increase the Region 6 except 680 & 690 quota from 3 to 4 with a female sub-quota of 2

Region 7

- Increase the Region 7 quota from 30 to 35

Action: *Commissioner Tourtlotte moved and Chairman Vermillion seconded the Commission to adopt the proposed 2013 lion quotas/sub-quotas as presented by FWP for Region 6 and Region 7.*

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed

16. Suspension of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Plan Elements – Final

George Pauley, Wildlife Management Division Chief explained the decision notice and environmental assessment for FWP's Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Management Plan for Free Ranging Wildlife in Montana were completed in 2005. The plan sought to outline FWP responses to CWD detection in free-ranging wildlife by depopulating the local herd when

various techniques showed that at least 5 percent of a herd contracted the disease and would be eradicated by removing the host species within some area containing infected individuals. Eradication efforts didn't result in a decline in disease prevalence or the abundance of animals in the infected herd. There is not a clear prescription for managing CWD. Current state plans lean heavily on an adaptive management approach, which depends on research to guide future decisions. This proposal is to temporarily suspend some management and surveillance portions of Montana's approved CWD plan until a new plan is approved. FWP's wildlife health staff is currently developing new alternatives for the management portion of the plan and developing plans for reduced surveillance efforts commensurate with current funding levels. These efforts will lead to development of new alternatives that will ultimately be submitted to the Commission for approval. The public comment period on this proposal ran through March 25. Three comments expressing both concern and support were received.

Action: Commissioner Ream moved and Commissioner Wetsit seconded the FWP Commission adopt the suspension of portions of the Chronic Wasting Disease Management Plan for Free Ranging Wildlife in Montana as presented by FWP.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed

17. 2013 Grazing and Farming Leases – Final

Ken McDonald, Wildlife Administrator explained the Grazing and Farming Leases/Habitat Montana program, which FWP and the Commission establish a statewide wildlife habitat system which will conserve our wildlife resources and pass them intact to future generations. The goals consist of conservation of wildlife populations and natural communities, conservation land and water resources and enhance Montana quality of life. Lease/grazing helps maintain and conserve habitats. All are unique. Different reasons for all leases.

Region 3

Wall Creek

The Wall Creek 7,067 acres Wildlife Management Area (WMA) was purchased in 1960 by FWP and in 1982 a rest-rotation grazing system was implemented with an exchange of forage use intended to benefit all parties involved through improvement of the condition and palatability of the forage base; to provide a rotational system that includes rest pastures on adjacent U.S. Forest Service lands above WMA; to increase control and management of livestock during occasional early fall snowstorms that push cattle out of the hills and down onto WMA; to form a cooperative agreement with area ranchers to receive in-kind services, which were mainly to supervise livestock use and to prevent undesirable levels of forage utilization on the USFS or FWP lands; to enhance desirability of the WMA for elk and to reduce game damage to neighboring lands. FWP would provide a five year grazing lease for spring and fall grazing on the WMA, continuing a rest rotation system. The program would encompass 6,149 acres owned by FWP, 918 acres FWP leases from DNRC, 300 acres owned by BLM and 9,503 acres of Forest Service land. Under the lease, the grazing association would pay the DNRC grazing rate of 9.94 per Animal Unit Month (AUM) on the land and perform maintenance activities. Public notice was given on FWP website and in the Bozeman Daily Chronicle and the Helena Independent Record. Copies of the environmental assessment were distributed to interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

Commissioner Stuker reminded the Department to change the grazing schedule from three years to five years (2013-2017).

Fleecer

FWP is proposing to maintain a coordinated rest-rotation grazing program on Fleecer Wildlife Management Area for a six-year term to extend April 2013 through October 2018. The program began in 1982 and has been in effect in its current format since 1987, consists of a spring grazing exchange agreement, 500 AUM with Smith 6 Bar S Livestock and a separate fall fee-grazing agreement 94 AUM with Smith 6 Bar S Livestock and Russel Dupuis. This arrangement would involve 3,700 acres of FWP leased land, 875 acres DNRC land, 1,920 acres of Smith 6 Bar S Livestock land, and 640 acres DNRC leased by Smith 6 Bar S Livestock. The WMA Coordinated Grazing System provides landscape level management of elk winter range across ownerships and demonstrates the compatibility of livestock production and wildlife/recreation-based values. An EA was completed and released for public comment which included posting on the FWP web page, mailing to a standard list of interested persons, and legal notices in the local papers. Fifteen parties submitted comments; four represented themselves while eleven represented organizations or agencies, eight stated support for Alternative A, six parties either stated or implied support for Alternative C and one party did not clearly state support for any of the alternatives but did provide four points of concern.

Robb/Ledford

FWP proposes to extend the grazing lease on the Robb/Ledford WMA with the Ledford Creek Gazing Association for one year. FWP anticipates a more comprehensive review and longer term lease would be considered in the coming months. This proposed lease extension would allow for the continuation of a rest-rotation grazing system at 2,955 AUM and involving 17,302 acres of FWP land, 10,796 acres of DNRC land, leased by FWP, 680 acres of BLM land, and 3,600 acres of DNRC land, known as the McGuire unit, that is leased by the Ledford Creek Gazing Association. FWP determined the EA completed in 2009 for a three-year grazing lease on Robb/Ledford WMA, suffices as being applicable for this proposal, no substantive changes have occurred to the system or affected environment since 2009. During the comment period in 2009 public involvement included: two public notices in the Bozeman Chronicle and Butte Standard; one statewide press release; public notice on the FWP web page; and copies of the EA were distributed to the neighboring landowners and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed

Chairman Vermillion moved and Commissioner Stuker seconded to approve the Wall Creek WMA grazing lease with the Wall Creek Grazing Association, approve the Fleecer WMA Grazing Lease Renewal as described in the final EA and approve the Rob/Ledford WMA grazing lease extension for one year.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Jay Bodner, Montana Stockgrowers Association, leases are very important and supports all three them.

Jim Bailey, Gallatin Wildlife Association, stated grazing program deserves a lot of attention and spoke about different problems within the program.

Glen Hockett, Gallatin Wildlife Association, no Wildlife Management Plan being discussed, needs to be done on all WMA's.

Nancy Shultz, stated drought language is not in the EA; gave an explanation why and would like a council formed to take a look at the program.

Illona Popar, Bear Creek Council, in support of the last three speakers, urges to take time on this issue.

Chairman Vermillion explained sub-section 3, states the Department has the discretion to adjust the AUM on unforeseen circumstances (ie: fire, drought).

Chairman Vermillion commended the Vannah Boccadori and Howard Burt for all their hard work on this issue.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed

Region 4

Beartooth

FWP proposes to renew a six-year grazing lease on approximately 4,960 acres of the Beartooth WMA for cattle grazing to better manage vegetation for wildlife cover and forage on the WMA and adjacent private land. This WMA pasture is part of a larger 21,440 acre rest rotation grazing system that involves Sieben Live Stock Company land. The system has been in operation for the past 21 years. FWP has had two successful long-standing grazing leases with Sieben Live Stock Company, 4,960 pasture and 875 acres. Anticipated grazing season dates: early season graze - May 15 to July 15; post seed ripe graze - July 15 to September 1 or complete rest during the six year lease. The proposed lease renewal EA received 19 comments; 17 positive, two neutral/negative.

Blackleaf

Blackleaf WMA encompasses over 9,000 acres and the affected area of the proposed action is primarily limber pine and grassland savannah, with scattered Douglas fir; elk, mule and white-tailed deer and pronghorn antelope currently use the WMA throughout the year. Beginning in 2002, a four-pasture grazing rotation, one pasture is grazed and three are rested each year, was established to improve vegetation quality and productivity. The proposed action is directed at continuing the grazing system by renewing a grazing lease for seven years with the Pollock Ranch, thus helping to maintain the vigor, palatability and attractiveness of vegetation for the benefit of wildlife. Year-round and seasonal forage for elk, mule deer,

pronghorn antelope and other big game will be maintained. Public hunting access on the lessee's property will be incorporated within the grazing lease. The EA for the project was released on February 20 with comments accepted through March 13. FWP received one comment from one party which expressed support for the proposed action.

Action: Commissioner Wetsit moved and Commissioner Stuker seconded to renew the six-year livestock grazing lease with Sieben Live Stock Company on the Staunten Cow Camp portion of the Beartooth WMA and to approve the Blackleaf WMA grazing lease with the Pollock Ranch.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Rob Bullis, stated the Blackleaf WMA is a win-win situation for all parties involved.

Rob Boden, Montana Stockgrowers Association stands in support of the Beartooth WMA.

Unknown, asked about large fires in the Beartooth WMA.

McDonald stated yes there has been fires in the Beartooth, not sure of this area. There would not be any grazing during this time period.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed

Region 6 & 7

Fresno Reservoir

The Fresno Reservoir WMA is approximately 2,640 acres located 24 miles northwest of Havre is managed by FWP through a long term lease agreement with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for the primary benefit of wildlife and recreation. The WMA consists of Milk River riparian, native mixed-grass prairie and wetland habitats. The WMA has been grazed under a three-pasture rest-rotation grazing system for the past 21 years. The Department is asking to extend the grazing lease for two years until September 15, 2014. The current stocking rate is 300 AUM and the grazing period is from May 15 to September 15. A draft EA was made available to the public on the FWP website and copies were mailed to surrounding landowners, Hill County Commissioners, other interested agencies and individuals and public notices were printed in the Havre Daily News and Great Falls Tribune. A public meeting was held in Havre on March 7; 14 members of the public were in attendance. The members of the public attending this meeting were supportive of extending the grazing lease. Nine comments were received: six comments in support of the proposed action and three were opposed.

Isaac Homestead – Grazing Lease

The 1,169 acre Isaac Homestead WMA was purchased by FWP to provide maximum hunting opportunities, while also providing productive habitat for a variety of wildlife species. The 675 acres retired agricultural fields in the proposed area currently contain stands of rank grass that are in need of rejuvenating. The proposed action is to allow short term winter grazing under a one-year lease with the intent of restoring plant productivity and species diversity, improving the habitat for pheasant and turkey nesting and brood rearing and improved cover for recreational hunting, as well as improving forage quality for a variety of wildlife species at a rate 20.50 AUM. FWP received four total comments from four individuals: one expressed support for the proposed alternative and three expressed opposition in addition to requesting clarification of the intent and justification for the proposed project.

Isaac Homestead – Farming Lease

The 1,169 acre Isaac Homestead WMA was purchased by FWP to maintain a woodland/cropland complex to benefit a diversity of wildlife while maximizing hunting opportunities. The proposed action is to renew a one-year farming lease with Bob Redland on 125 acres. The lessee will cultivate, plant, and harvest a portion of the hay/grain crop, leaving 20 percent of the agricultural crops standing for wildlife use during winter months. The benefit and purpose of the lease is to provide winter habitat and forage. Standing crops also benefit migrating waterfowl and a variety of other wildlife species. The EA for the project was released on January 30, 2013 and received four total comment: two comments indicated support for the proposed project and two requested clarification of the intent and justification for the proposed project.

Elk Island – Grazing Lease

The 1,525-acre Elk Island WMA was purchased by FWP to provide maximum hunting opportunities, by keeping the habitat in a productive and healthy condition. The retired 272 acres agricultural fields in the project area currently contain stands of rank, minimally productive grass. The proposed action is to implement a three-year grazing lease following a

three-pasture rest rotation grazing plan at a rate of 9.94 AUM. Grazing the rank vegetation will restore it to a productive state with improved plant diversity, enhancing these habitats for pheasant nesting and brood rearing cover and forage for a variety of wildlife species. If approved, the grazing lease will go out for public bid. The EA for the project was released on January 31, 2013. Thirteen comments received: two were in support, seven opposed, and four requested clarification.

Elk Island – Farming Lease

The 1,525-acre Elk Island WMA was purchased by FWP to maintain a woodland/cropland complex to benefit a diversity of wildlife while maximizing hunting opportunities. The proposed action is to renew a farming lease agreement with Wade Hagler for one year on 152 acres of the WMA. The lessee will cultivate, plant, and harvest a portion of the hay/grain crop, leaving 25 percent of crops and 35 percent of irrigated hay standing for wildlife use during winter months. The benefit and purpose of the lease is to provide winter habitat and forage. The EA for the project was released on January 31, 2013. FWP received two comments representing one person and one group; both comments requested clarification of the intent and justification for the project.

Seven Sisters

Seven Sisters WMA was purchased by FWP to maintain a woodland/cropland complex to benefit a diversity of wildlife while maximizing hunting opportunities. The proposed action involves two leases. FWP proposes to renew a one-year lease agreement on 122 acres of the WMA with Steve Pust. A new, one-year agricultural lease is proposed for 201 acres of the WMA that were purchased by FWP in December 2012. Pust was leasing this land prior to FWP purchasing the property and had already prepared the land for this spring's planting therefore, Pust would also retain a lease to the new ground in 2013. For both leases, the lessee will harvest a portion of the hay/grain crop, and leave 25 percent of crops and 35 percent of irrigated hay standing for wildlife use. The benefit and purpose of both leases is to provide winter habitat and forage, primarily for wintering pheasants, deer, and turkeys. Standing crops also benefit migrating waterfowl and a variety of other wildlife species. After this upcoming growing season, FWP intends to combine the two leases and conduct a new leasing process for 2014. The EA for the project was released on January 31, 2013. FWP received three comments: one comment was opposed and two comments requested clarification.

Action: Commissioner Tourtlotte moved and Commissioner Stuker seconded the FWP Commission approve the Region 6 and Region 7 grazing and farming leases.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Vermillion stated any additional visual monitoring data would be appreciated. Asked the Department to prioritize biologist time to particular leases that will be coming up next year, will be time well spent.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed

18. Open Microphone – Public Opportunity to Address FWP Issues Not on Agenda

Ilona Popper, Gardner, MT, Bear Creek Council, spoke about wolf predation in Montana.

John Indrehus, stated there is a problem of motor use/watercraft on the Clark Fork River and physical limitations.

Greg Munther, Montana Chapter Back Country Hunters and Anglers Chairman explained there is a problem with motorized/non-motorized watercraft and noise interference.

Brian Bidlake there was no comprised regarding regulations on the Clark Fork River motorized/non-motorized watercraft.

Michael Gibson, Montana Trout Unlimited, spoke about the Clark Fork River motorized/non-motorized watercraft ruling.

Chairman Vermillion stated he will take the matters under advisement.

Commissioner Ream explained he has resigned his position as Commissioner as of April 12, 2013. Several Republican Senators stated he would not be confirmed by the Montana Senate and chose not to waste his time on a sham hearing, nor subject himself or his family to a Senate confirmation process that has a predetermined partisan outcome. Thanked Governor Bullock for his appointment nomination.

Commissioner Ream motioned and Chairman Vermillion seconded to adjourn the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 4:02 p.m.

Dan Vermillion, Chairman

M. Jeff Hagener, Director